

Joachim Bruhn

## From Anti-Zionism to Antisemitism

Zionism is a wrong answer to antisemitism. It was, however, the only historically appropriate answer.

*Translated by E. A.<sup>[1]</sup>*

Everyone speaks of “Zionism” instead of Israeli nationalism. What is to be thought of Zionism and anti-Zionism in lights of a materialist notion of the nation? And why is it correct to claim that anti-Zionism is merely the left-wing appearance of antisemitism?

### I Critique of the State instead of Anti-Zionism

What the UN, pressured by the Arab and Soviet camp, condemned in 1975 as the ‘racist essence of Zionism’ is the essence of statehood itself: Homogeneity and homogenisation of individuals to form a state’s people and, thereby, the material for domination. Anti-Zionism, however, displays a peculiar yet revealing lack of interest in this unique process of *ex nihilo* constitution of a civil state power, this historically unprecedented catching-up to statehood. In a time lapse, the founding of Israel carried out the process of primitive accumulation, which had taken over 200 years in Europe, on the indigenous Arab population. It did not, however, attempt to compensate the subsistence farmers who were set free in the course of agricultural capitalisation with industrialisation. For this reason, the founding of Israel appears to the bourgeois philo-semitic as an unprecedented miracle, and to the left-wing anti-Zionist as pure cruelty. However, in their German-nationalist reverence and their tankie-esque outraged aversion alike, these critics of Israel have nothing in mind than their self-referential illusion of the good state, be it nationalist or socialist.

The “artificiality of the Zionist entity”, which anti-Zionism laments so much about Israel, lies precisely in the Jewish state’s failure to claim the false naturalness and pseudo-origin *ab ovo* which, in Europe, served as smokescreens for Absolutism’s transformation to civil statehood.

Standing under the spell of the idealist slogan of the “right to self-determination”, the anti-Zionists treat the question of the constitution of statehood like any theory of constitutionality and the state would: as a problem of morals and of rights.

They prefer to talk about the crucial question of whether the Jews even constitute a *Volk*<sup>[2]</sup> and can, therefore, lay claim to national rights. They continuously recycle the criteria of what constitutes a *people* but never approach the answer, which is that the political unity of a *people* is by no means derived from language, culture, history or the like, but rather from the establishment of a political centrality capable of setting and asserting borders. The criteria that nationalism establishes for a *people*’s existence, both in its left-wing and its right-wing disposition, are arbitrary illustrations of a sovereign rule already established, or of a movement eager to found a state.

Being the Jews’ national liberation movement, Zionism faces the dilemma of having to constitute, more precisely: of having to will the Jews as a *people* and as the basis of legitimate state power. Which is to say, of producing a *people* whose *positive* commonality, at the begin of the 20th century – apart from some remainders of religious tradition – existed only in the negativity of common persecutions past, present, and future. The Jews’ commonality as a *people* could not be derived from their unquestionable unity as a state power’s material, neither could it be reconstructed on the basis of an undoubted

synthesis as subjects of an economy, nor could it be brought about as confessors of a mutual faith. The objective reason of their affiliation as a community of the persecuted necessarily remained hidden to the Jews, whether they organised as bourgeois or proletarian assimilationists, or alternatively as civic or socialist nationalists.

## **II Merit and Dilemma of Zionism**

Theodor Herzl and the Zionist movement's founding fathers had better anticipated the virulence of antisemitism than allegedly scientific socialism. The paradox of being persecuted without giving any cause to do so, the logical contradiction of being put in the center of social aggression without being *guilty*, the absurd occurrence that capitalised Western societies and semi-asiatic Eastern societies alike, albeit for different reasons, were preparing for the preemptive strike, although Jewish existence did nothing to invite, prompt, or justify it – this objectively absurd phenomenon they could impossibly grasp. However, realising that capital and the state process the contradictions of their innermost workings falsely, but reliably, by means of antisemitism, would not have helped them in the least.

So-called scientific socialism, on the other hand, which, after all, correctly explained the hatred against Jews as a “socially constituted” problem that “could only be suspended socially”, always remained far below the practical level of Zionism, which falsely interpreted antisemitism to be anthropologically caused and eternally irremediable. This false prognosis has stood the test like no other nationalism’s – because antisemitism, while in itself being far from eternal, tends to be forcibly eternalised by Capitalist world society: “The Jew” is a projection of bourgeois society, which, in the manner of a redirected action, attempts to overcome its antagonism through his persecution.

The critique of all national liberation movements is aimed at Zionism, as well – in a form, however, that has to reflect upon the social configuration of the antisemitic question. Every critique of Zionism as Israeli nationalism must consider it insincere to gleefully denounce the only reaction which remained for Jews after the bankruptcy of bourgeois Enlightenment and the failure of proletarian world revolution. Zionism is the wrong answer to antisemitism which, in horrendous hindsight, has proved itself to be the only provisionally adequate answer in history. In contrast, the only right answer – revolution for a stateless and classless society – has been humiliated by Stalinism to the point of being an unworldly utopia of fringe lunatics.

Seen from this perspective, Israel is the only available means of self-defence against rampant worldwide antisemitism – even though it is not a final bulwark. Every single Jew's entitlement to Israeli citizenship is far from solving the antisemitic question. However, it is a first-grade historical achievement, at least in a world of nation-states, in which – like the fates of stateless people prove – being human means little whereas being a citizen of a state at least means something. Precisely because the assertion that the Jews are merely a religious group and, because of that, nothing else but citizens of their respective states, has long been refuted by history – most recently, by all means of which a German *Volksgemeinschaft*<sup>[3]</sup> is capable –, Israel's existence is indispensable.

## **III The Left and the *Volksgemeinschaft***

Because, after Auschwitz, modern antisemitism is forced to appear as anti-Zionism, Israel, the *Judenstaat* ('Jew-State'), is awarded the usual projection. It is the ideal canvas both for bourgeois and for alternative-left nightmares, especially in Germany. What they themselves want, but presently prove to be incapable of, is insinuated as the Israelis' intent and action. Only against this backdrop, the

obtrusive suggestion that Israelis think of themselves as the “chosen people” and the world's potential saviours can be understood – it is envy of their supposed advantages. Allegedly, the Jews are the ones denying equality. What comes to light in their denunciation as elitist, arrogant – in short: enemies of the people – and as being *more equal than others*, is their accusers’ own perception of being called to higher things and craving to no longer have their light put under a bushel.

In the imagination of the antisemite, the Jews have what he wants to have and prevent him from attaining it: blood ties that are thicker than water, national identity, community as a *people*, unquestionable unity as a natural and racial feature, synthesis of individual and society beyond generalised competition and envy. The atomised individuals, socially deprived of Reason and thrown back to their mere intellect, long for their demise and their merging into a repressive collective, which can finally bring forth serenity, order, and a tangible overview. That which stands as an obstacle or in opposition to this wish is projected on the *essence of Jewishness*, redemption from which can only come about by its extermination.

In addition to this projection, delusions of persecution arise, the political expression of paranoia. Those with hallucinatory fear of their own impending annihilation will not be lacking in reasons for self-defence. To them, the Jews are the “anti-race” (Hitler) and their statelike *entity* is the antithesis to proper statehood. Modern antisemitism exists not in spite, but precisely because of Auschwitz: It will never pardon the Jews for Auschwitz, nor forgive them for cheating the Germans out of their *Volksgemeinschaft*.

What stands out is that “Zionism”, as it is used by German “anti-Zionists”, is more than just a name for Jewish nationalism before the foundation of Israel and for Israeli nationalism afterwards. When the Israeli Left calls its critique of the nationalism of Israeli society and its state anti-Zionism, the term is merely a customary denomination for that critique. In Germany – and among international friends of the homogenous *people* – “anti-Zionism” is generally an indicator of projection and, therefore, not a mere denomination for what could possibly be called differently, but rather a cipher and a code. In it, there is a resonance and discrete sense of what the Left thinks and feels, but what only the Right dares to say publicly. Why did left-wingers even distance themselves from the *Antizionistische Aktion* of Michael Kühnen<sup>[4]</sup>, when they have never criticised anti-Zionism in-itself, and although they themselves allege the Zionist Jews of harbouring the religious obsession with power of a “chosen people” instead of adhering to a regular *raison d’État*?

As a precondition for any and all discussion, Zionism is to be understood as the Jewish national liberation movement, and, thereafter, that it is a denomination for Israeli nationalism which cannot be employed in Germany.

## Footnotes

[1] This article was written by Joachim Bruhn and was originally published in 1997 in the German newspaper Jungle World. Footnotes were added by the translator to explain certain German terms which are untranslatable.

[2] The German noun *das Volk* (lit. ‘the people’) constitutes a peculiar triple entendre. Firstly, it can refer to the inhabitants of a place, ‘the townspeople’, as in *Viel Volk war auf den Straßen*, ‘many people were out and about in the streets’; this meaning is largely synonymous with the word *Bevölkerung*, ‘population’. Secondly, it is used to refer to an ethnic and/or national collective as in *Das deutsche Volk*, ‘the German people’, which, depending on whether the speaker believes in ethnic *ius sanguinis* or civil

*ius soli*, means to say ‘people of German blood’ or ‘German citizens’; Joachim Bruhn has criticised both of these definitions as ideological oscillations around the central Capitalist problem of subjectivization (see Bruhn 1994, “Unmensch und Übermensch”). Thirdly, *Volk* has been and continues to be used by the political Left, including Marxists, to refer to notions ranging from the eulogised ‘simple people’ to the adored ‘oppressed peoples’. What Bruhn says above must therefore be understood in the sense that both left- and right-wing anti-Zionists measure the Jewish state up against their respective notion of an authentic *Volk*. Hereafter, wherever the original text says *Volk*, it is translated as cursive *people*.

[3] *Die Volksgemeinschaft*, ‘the people’s community’, as a political notion arose in the 19th century; its implications are that of a community defined by common descent, cultural heritage, and shared interests, as opposed to a society defined by abstract statehood, individualism, and internal (class) struggles. Propagated already during World War I by Imperial German authorities, the *Volksgemeinschaft* and its concurrent idea of the community's *Lebensraum* (‘habitat’, still used in reference to animal species) became hegemonic state ideology with the National Socialists’ takeover in 1933. In the past, Bruhn and others have criticised the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as the former GDR, as continuations of the *Volksgemeinschaft* under the guise of liberal democracy and state socialism.

[4] Michael Kühnen (1955–1991) was a German neo-Nazi and leader of the *Aktionsfront Nationaler Sozialisten/Nationale Aktivisten* (‘Action Front of National Socialists/National Activists’) and, until his death, self-styled *Führer* of the *Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (‘Free German Workers’ Party). Throughout the 1980s, Kühnen and others started the *Antizionistische Aktion* (‘anti-Zionist Action’, named clearly in reference to the *Antifaschistische Aktion*, ‘antifascist action’), which called for “struggle against Zionism” and spread propaganda against Israel, the United States of America (which they condemned as a Zionist puppet state), and against German Jews.